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THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN ADULT EDUCATION. TITLE I NEWSLETTER,
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THE AUTHOR PREDICTS TEN FUTURE EVENTS THAT WILL MARK THE
TRANSFORMATION FROM OPPORTUNITY TO REALITY OF EDUCATION FOR
ALL AMERICANS. (1) THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT WILL EMERGE WITH
PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR ADULT EDUCATION. (2) MORE
INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION WILL OFFER ADVANCED DEGREES
IN ADULT EDUCATION. (3) BY 1980, 20 PERCENT OF THE ADULT
POPULATION WILL BE COMMITTED TO AT LEAST ONE PROGRAM OF
PART-TIME STUDY. (4) ADULTS WILL BE PAID TO GO TO SCHOOL AS
AN ORDINARY PRACTICE. (5) ADULT EDUCATION WILL EMERGE AS A
MAJOR CONCERN OF SOCIAL SCIENTISTS. (6) "EASIER LEARNING IN
LESS TIME," MADE POSSIBLE BY EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY, WILL
ENJOY A BRIEF PERIOD OF GENERAL ENTHUSIASM BY THE EDUCATIONAL
SCIENTIST. (7) THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE WILL EMERGE AS THE
FASTEST-GROWING SEGMENT OF ADULT EDUCATION. (8) THE ADULT
EDUCATION ASSOCIATION WILL GAIN ENORMOUS STRENGTH AS THE
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ALL ADULT EDUCATORS. (9) COMPARATIVE
ADULT EDUCATION WILL BECOME A FAVORITE STUDY OF PROFESSIONAL
ADULT EDUCATORS. (10) A CONCERN FOR VALUES WILL REQUIRE
ASSISTANCE OF PHILOSOPHERS IN DEVELOPING CURRICULUM. (THIS IS
A REPRINT OF A SPEECH MADE AT THE TENNESSEE CONFERENCE FOR
INSTITUTIONAL REPRESENTATIVES CONCERNING TITLE I, CONDUCTED
AT NASHVILLE, ON AUGUST 4, 1967) (RT)

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TITLE I NEWSLETTER -- NUMBER 12

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This Newsletter reproduces the speech made by Dr. Thurman J. White at the Tennessee Conference for Institutional Representatives concerning Title I, conducted at Nashville, Tennessee, on August 4, 1967. Dr. White is Dean of the College of Continuing Education at the University of Oklahoma, and he is a member of the President's National Advisory Council on Extension and Continuing Education. This address aroused so much favorable comment that it was decided to make the essay available to those interested in adult and continuing education in Tennessee.

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THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN ADULT EDUCATION

Thurman J. White

Communism is more than Marxism, Catholicism is more than the Roman Curia, Democracy is more than Jefferson, Justice is more than Caesar, Wisdom is more than Socrates, and the Future is more than an oracle at Delphi or an oracle in Nashville. This is the lesson of the past. If we in our time are more logical, or perhaps mystical, or even noisome, the truths we perceive will be finally and certainly seen in later years as truths located firmly in the time of their utterance. This is the weakness and the glory of man.

What then is the value of an essay on the future of adult education in America? Very little indeed if the statement is regarded as a revelation from Delphi. A reader who commits resources or a campaign to the thoughts of this essay will have missed the point. A reader who regards the thoughts as speculative hypotheses for observation through the years ahead will have thoroughly grasped their purport. We like to think there are intellects who accommodate the future best when they have defined the paths which events tend to follow or from which events clearly depart. It is in the spirit of hypothetical speculation that this essay is offered. It is not a forecast; it is not a prediction. It is a series of ten speculations. It is offered to intellects which like to chart a course and then make adjustments as changes in environment and circumstance may require or make desirable.

So what of the future? Does it promise more or less learning? Will ignorance or intellect come into its own? Is the better life in not knowing or in learning? Is it in force or in reason?

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The facts of the future as we now see them are that tomorrow does not belong to the knowing, it belongs to the learning. The victory does not belong to the troops who have learned their lessons well; it belongs to the troops who are learning their lessons well. The future does not belong to the nation which has learned its history well; it belongs to the people who are learning their lessons well.

How will this happen in America?

In this essay we present ten future events which we think will most likely mark the transformation from the opportunity to the reality of education for all Americans. We choose to refer to the selected events as "prospects." The temptation is great to refer to them as "probabilities." But the probability which seems to make uncertainties of otherwise probable predictions is the overriding probability of enormous changes in areas outside of and beyond adult education but changes which will completely alter the nature of adult education. We do not and cannot forecast such changes, but it is not at all difficult to imagine what some of them might be. For example, someone may invent a feasible plan for disarmament. When he does, an incredible amount of surplus power will be released in England, Russia, France, China, and the United States. The consequence could be a breath-taking development of poor countries. Or someone may invent a way to make the great desert regions fertile and inhabitable. The consequence could be an immediate dislocation of population pressures. Or someone may invent an irresistibly attractive urban community of limited thousands. The consequence could be a reversal of population flow into the megalopolis of millions. Or someone may invent a cosmic society. The consequence could be a rush to colonize outer space. Or someone may invent a world order of justice. The consequence could be a fusion of pooled sovereignties. Or someone may invent a chemical technique for encapsulating knowledge, e.g., one capsule taken orally and a person has a mastery of calculus. The consequence could be instant wisdom.

If you say the examples are not probabilities but only fantasies, I must reply that they are examples of the probability of enormous change. The world of today would surely be equally improbable if viewed through the eyes of King Arthur--or perhaps of Merlin, for that matter. A change of the size and consequence of the examples just given may occur at any moment; this is the mark of our times; it is the daily expectation of our lives. When it comes, several parts of our lives will be revolutionized, including the system and programs of adult education. Because I am convinced that enormous change is highly probable during the next ten to fifteen years, I am only willing to invite attention to the prospects of adult education in the immediate future. If an enormous change does not occur, then I am willing to have readers in 1980 know that I do regard the prospects as probabilities.

PROSPECT NUMBER I. The federal government will emerge with the primary responsibility for adult education. While such a prospect may seem natural to English readers, it is not an easily derived conclusion for the United States of America. The event will be forced to weave its way through heavy and formidable opposition. Many hold stoutly to the position that adults have money so let them pay for their further education if they want it. On a different and higher level, many fear the tyranny of federal thought control. Others, of a legalistic turn, find the possibility in direct conflict with the constitutional reservation of powers and responsibilities for education to the various states. And others view with alarm the possible imprisonment of a free movement in the federal bureaucracy. But the fact is the federal government is already close to the primary responsibility for adult education in the United States. The trend is toward additional federal responsibility and the opposition is seemingly more inclined to shape and channel the trend than to halt or reverse it.

PROSPECT NUMBER II. At least one institution of higher education in each year of the next decade will begin to offer an advanced degree in adult education. Or perhaps we should say, by the end of the next decade at least ten more institutions of higher education will offer an advanced degree in adult education. The cadence of the development will depend to a great extent on the availability of scholarships and research funds. Graduate programs and research tend to be associated. The strong graduate programs at California, Chicago, Columbia, and Wisconsin illustrate the point. Not only do these institutions produce the largest number of doctorates, but it may be noted the reports of research and investigations have been for several years peppered with credits to the same institutions. As research support is increased, we may expect to find strong graduate programs developing.

PROSPECT NUMBER III. By 1980, twenty percent of the adult population will be committed to at least one program of part-time study which will keep them busy learning for one to ten years. Another twenty percent will be engaged in programs of a few days or a few weeks. A very few years ago such a statement would have been ridiculous. Now it may be conservative. What makes me think so? (1) The professional and technical portion of the population is more than twenty percent. To this number must be added a guess as to the voluntary participation of people in the service occupations, housewives, and laborers--especially if and when the latter have included education as a part of the labor union package. (2) The demand for educational programs should increase as the amount of childhood education is elevated. At the moment, about one-half of the population is under twenty-five years of age. For this group, a high school education is now the standard, and some post high school education is now the norm. Since the push for continuing education is closely associated with the amount of childhood schooling, we should expect a corresponding elevation in the pressure for continuing education during the next ten to fifteen years.

The implication for adult educators may all be summed up in one simple admonition: get ready. Long-term programs have a way of demanding long-term planning. One can almost write a rule which states, "The excellent long-term programs in adult education are the consequence of excellent long-term planning." The standard ratio of preparation to recitation in the American college is two hours of study for each hour in the classroom. Something of an analogy may be found in the preparation of long-term programs, i.e., two years of deliberation for each year of offering.

PROSPECT NUMBER IV. Adults will be paid to go to school as an ordinary practice. Does this sound like the mad ravings of an educational fanatic? Would it sound any better to say that adults are now paid to go to school? Because they are.

Thousands of them. And a very respectable expenditure it is when we call it "executive development," "supervisory training," "professorial sabbatical," "Operation bootstrap," or "on-the-job training." What is unthinkable would be a living wage for an adult to learn "modern dance," "the art of Jackson Pollock," "the wisdom of China," "justice through the ages," "oriental and occidental tolerance," or "world visions and the image of man." The principle is that "kind begets kind." We are now willing to spend money on an education which will produce money; but not on an education which will produce a human. Our actions say, when money is invested, its return should be in kind; else the species will die. We even justify the war on poverty in the spirit of "kind begets kind." By the vast expenditures for "Job Corps," "VISTA," "Headstart," "community action programs," and so on, we hope to move people from the public relief rolls to someone's payroll. When this happens, the various taxes on the newly generated lifetime incomes will more than pay the cost of the so-called poverty programs.

In spite of all of this, the prospects for paying people to become human seems good enough to include in this essay. One of the most likely places for the break-through is in labor. Paul Sheats has had a remarkable positive response to his suggestion that labor now bargain for one day per week for education. Some responses to the Sheat's suggestion are that business and industry should get the jump on labor by offering a variety of educational programs on company time. After all, the argument runs, the tuition assistance program is a common industrial practice; it is non-bargained and hence a management credit. To extend the expenditures for tuition assistance to cover the salary and wages is a plausible next step.

PROSPECT NUMBER V. Adult education will emerge as a major concern of the social scientists, and particularly as a concern for the educational theorists. One takes no risk in assuming that educational activity on the part of most if not all Americans will increasingly receive the systematic attention of thoughtful observers. As adult education assumes a place of popular expression, a variety of social sciences may usefully come to bear on its problems. Drucker has recently pointed out:

Each specialty typically progresses by acquiring knowledge produced in another specialty and projecting on its own subject matter. Only rarely is progress in one area fueled from within. The biologist breaks through to a new dimension of understanding by applying what physicists, chemists, and statisticians have learned. Similarly the economist acquires new knowledge and power by going to school with the mathematician, the psychologist, and the anthropologist, and so on. Knowledge is truly one; and the specialties, no matter how powerfully established as academic departments, are nothing but temporary scaffolding, obscuring the full structure of knowledge while they help us to get to one part and to go to work on it and through it on knowledge as a whole. Unless one understands the interrelatedness and interdependence of specialties and the essential oneness of all knowledge, he cannot progress in a discipline. One cannot, above all, learn what will be needed tomorrow.¹

His statement came in a context which illustrates his point. It was made in a symposium on social change and educational continuity at Oakland University. The distinguished members of the symposium were from the social disciplines of economics, history, psychology, and anthropology.

PROSPECT NUMBER VI. "Easier learning in less time" will enjoy a brief period of general enthusiasm by the educational psychologist and the educational technologist. The edges of the era are already enveloping the frontier of the field. We may later come to reflect upon it as the "hardware era." In it are all the paraphernalia of programmed instruction, television studios, and especially designed facilities. Into the hardware are now poured millions of dollars; out of it will come durable methodology.

PROSPECT NUMBER VII. The community college will emerge as the fastest growing segment of adult education. The prospect is perhaps a matter of personal opinion. Certainly, the statement will draw fire from adult educators who lead the programs in churches, industry, public schools, libraries, universities, IBM, and Xerox. All have substantial adult student bodies and ten years from now will have even more adult students.

Any argument from present strength will deny the prospect. For the bulk of the adult student body is presently most assuredly served by someone other than the community colleges.

¹Peter F. Drucker, "The University in an Educated Society," Oakland Papers: Symposium on Social Change and Educational Continuity, CSLEA Notes and Essays on Education for Adults No. 51 (Boston: Center for the Study of Liberal Education for Adults, 1966), pp. 12-13.

The reply to my reluctant colleagues begins with the thought that the community college has barely begun its move into the educational stream. Its form is still pliable and open to forces of the future. It has no yoke of traditional functions which it must first perform before getting around to adult education; it has no hardening of the curriculum arteries to be dissipated. Its buildings yet unbuilt have no pre-cast architectural pattern; and its invitations to learning are being readied for a list of guests not yet determined. It is located within driving distance; and its aim is service to high school graduates--which, as we may note, may soon include most Americans.

My guess is that society will see the community college as a highly desirable means for institutionalizing adult education. It is a prospect to be watched and responded to with unflagging attention.

PROSPECT NUMBER VIII. The Adult Education Association of the U.S.A. will gain enormous strength as the strong national association of all adult educators. The prospect will not weaken the present strong organizations in the field. Indeed, all seem destined to become stronger.

The prospect of the AEA of the USA emerging as the strong national organization will depend on the development of a wide-spread appreciation of the common concerns of adult educators and the development of a strong conviction that the common destiny will be improved by associating together. Already under way is work on a statement of common concerns which this week is studied by the AEA Delegate Assembly and eventually in some form be proposed for adoption as a manifesto of the field. The AEA is the only organization in America which provides a meeting place for all adult educators to work on their common problems. It seems likely to me that we will be as wise in using the opportunity as our predecessors were in providing it.

PROSPECT NUMBER IX. Comparative adult education will become a favorite study of professional adult educators. You may think the prospect is included in this essay as a consequence of my enthusiasm for my study as a Fellow of Rewley House at Oxford this fall. You are right, of course, up to a point.

For after all, the time spent as a Fellow of Rewley House is not forced labor. I was not conscripted to the post. The chance to share British learning was a temptation which, as Oscar Wilde would have it, I could only overcome by yielding to it.

The values of comparative study are lately coming to adult education, but the signs are there. The future for the comparative study of adult education promises as much excitement as any of the exciting prospects noted in this essay.

PROSPECT NUMBER X. A concern for values will infuse the efforts of curriculum development. Adult educators live in the midst of value conflicts. Their programs rise and fall with their ability to recognize and deal with conflict. The

future promises not relief but intensification of the situation. The mobility of the population and the instant availability of information are twin sources of the difficulty.

Once upon a time, a teacher could count on the ethnic homogeneity of the student body. They were all Christian, held to the inevitability of success through hard work, believed in the final authority of parents, took a dim view of installment buying, and would rather be a dead hero than a live coward. People made in-group jokes about minority religious groups, racial stereotypes, country ignorance, and the malapropisms of immigrants. All of this was once upon a time.

Now almost every program is in conflict with the interests of somebody. Labor is threatened by management training; management is threatened by worker's education. Landlords are threatened by community development; the poor are threatened by banker's institutes. The private economy is threatened by the training programs for welfare workers; public employees are threatened by the taxpayer's study of public expenditures. The extreme right is threatened by the teachings of the extreme left, and the extreme left is threatened by the teachings of the extreme right. The Christian Church is threatened by the teaching of comparative religion; and the faiths of other lands in our midst are threatened by the Christian assumptions of their teachers. The emotional commitments of the adult student body can no longer be taken for granted.

It will do no good to dismiss the problem by admonishing adult educators to leave values out of their programs. Adults bring all of themselves to educational programs, even to such non-value oriented as vocational training courses in welding. Much more helpful will be the thoughtful assistance of philosophers in the development of curriculum. The need seems irresistible. Indeed, future philosophers may look back at the next decade as their finest hour in the history of the human community.

We come now to the end of this series of speculations on adult education for all America. The prospects seem reasonable to me. What do you think?

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